

Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors 835-00

**5-Year Strategic Plan
FOR THE FISCAL YEARS 2025 – 2029**

Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors 835-00 5-Year Strategic Plan, FY 2025 – FY 2029

1. Our Mission

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors (Board) purpose is to provide for the regulation and practice of counseling as well as the use of the title "Licensed Professional Counselor" and "Provisional Licensed Professional Counselor" to ensure the protection of the public health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the State of Mississippi.

2. Our Philosophy

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors is committed to the continued safeguard of the public health, safety, and welfare of Mississippians. The philosophy of the Board is to adhere to the highest professional standards and to systematically enforce licensing and regulation of any person who presents himself/herself to the public as a Licensed Professional Counselor, Provisional Licensed Professional Counselor, counselor, or psychotherapist who offers professional counseling or psychotherapy services to individuals, groups, organizations, corporation, intuitions, government agencies, or the general public.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

Statewide Goal #1.: To protect Mississippians from risks to public health, provide them with the health-related information, and increase access to quality healthcare necessary to increase the length and quality of their lives.

Relevant Benchmarks #1: *Access to Care*

- Number of health professionals in shortage areas
- Number of practitioners needed to remove health professional shortage area designations, by type of practitioner
- Percentage of population lacking access to mental health care
- Percentage of population lacking access to community-based mental health care

Statewide Goal #2.:

To create an efficient government and an informed and engaged citizenry that helps to address social problems through the payment of taxes, the election of capable leaders at all levels of government, and participation in charitable organizations through contributions and volunteerism.

Relevant Benchmarks #1: *Cost of Government*

- Total state spending per capita
- Number of government employees per 10,000 population

Relevant Benchmarks #2.: *Government Efficiency*

- Administrative efficiency: Expenditures on state government administrative activities as a percentage of total operational expenditures
- Average wait time for state government services
- Regulatory efficiency: average length of time to resolution of documented complaints to professional licensing agencies
- Number and average cost of regulatory actions taken, by regulatory body and type of action
- State dollars saved by providing government services online (e.g., document retrieval, issuance of new business permits, license renewal)

4. Overview of the Agency 5-Year Strategic Plan:

The Mississippi Board of Examiners for Licensed Professional Counselors targeted priorities for the next five years:

- **LPC-S Training.** The Board recognizes the need for additional training for our Board qualified supervisors (LPC-S). The LPC-S designation was implemented in 2008, and many licensees completed the LPC-S requirements. However, the Board's processes for supervision have evolved over the past few years due to online reporting and the implementation of the P-LPC license in 2018. The Board wants to continue to conduct training so that all Board qualified supervisors are up to date and fully understand the Board's supervision process and expectations. By providing easy to access training modules or webinars, the Board's LPC-S can stay abreast of all the pertinent changes that will take place due to Rules and Regulations revisions and continual website updates.
- **Updating the Board's online portal for licensees and applicants.** The Board's current portal for licensees to manage their license, applications, etc. was designed in 2013, which was patterned to look and function like the public site ITS developed on or about 2007. Since then, significant advancements in technology and web design have occurred; however, because the Board's licensee platform is outdated and text-based, licensees have difficulty navigating the site. The Board will continue to update the licensee portal to a more modern, user-friendly environment with the FY2024 budget approval and will continue to make improvements. An updated online portal for licensees will provide a better, more efficient experience for licensees' needs without having to call the Board's office. Second, as part of updating the online portal, the Board will provide instructional videos and training modules to navigate the online portal for licensees and applicants.
- **Facilitated 2-day long range planning meeting.** The Board plans to continue with annual long range planning meeting which will focus on evaluating compliance with Universal Licensure, potential Rules and Regulation changes, and the National Counseling Compact which was signed into law in FY2023 and its impact on the LPC Board.
- **Outside investigator for complaints.** The Board's complaints, investigations, and administrative hearings have increased in number and complexity. Board members are

not compensated for their time for Board service. Board members volunteer their time for Board meetings and have limited time to conduct investigations, which occur outside of Board meetings. The amount of time to investigate complaints is a significant commitment of time. At a minimum, a complaint takes at least 3-4 hours. A complex case can require significant amounts of time to investigate, ranging from 40 – 60 hours. Board members are trained as counselors and educators and do not have the training to fully conduct investigations. The Board and public would benefit greatly from an outside investigator to conduct the investigation necessary for complaints. Cost of investigations with outside investigators is prohibitive for all or most complaints; therefore, a more comprehensive training in conducting investigations for the Board members who are required to cover the complaints would be extremely beneficial and warranted. The inclusion of former Board members as complaint/investigation consultants will be implemented.

- **Staffing Needs.** The Board will continue to assess its staffing needs as the residual effects from COVID, telehealth practices, accepting license transfers, Universal Licensure, and National Counseling Compact, are examined.
- **National Counseling Compact.** On March 16, 2022, Governor Tate Reeves signed House Bill 1056 to enact the Counseling Compact. Mississippi was the fourth state to enact the Compact. The Compact became active when 10 states enacted the Compact. The National Counseling Compact is an exciting new opportunity to help Licensed Professional Counselors in participating states resolve licensing issues across state boundaries. However, this Compact will require Rules and Regulations revisions to properly implement the Compact once the Compact Commission delegates are nominated by each of the first 10 states that enacted the Compact. Mississippi is proud to have a delegate on the Compact to adopt a set of uniform licensure standards for counseling and to recognize valid licenses issued by any state that has enacted the Compact. The Commission is empowered to issue Rules to ensure a responsive, adaptive, and sustainable Compact. The Board's Delegate serves on the Commission's Rules and Regulations committee that meets routinely. The Compact should provide for a quicker pathway for licensure portability than the Universal Licensure. The Compact enables licensed professional counselors who practice and reside within member states to practice without the need to obtain multiple licenses. With FY2024, the number of Compact member states is 29 plus District of Columbia.
- **Technology for Board.** The Board purchases equipment for its newly appointed Board members and updates or replaces older equipment use by other Board members to provide more user-friendly technology for the most efficient performance of the Board members, attorney, and Executive Director.

5. Agency's External/Internal Assessment

The Board, through its regularly and special called board meetings, discusses agency performance, priorities for the upcoming quarter and any additional issues that may affect the agency and/or the practice of Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of Mississippi and addresses deficiencies in the process. The Board continues an on-going process of evaluating all aspects of duties and responsibilities under the Board's mandate. This includes contracted services, standards set forth in the Rules & Regulations, Statutes, and standards/processes for license renewal. Based on that evaluation based on this ongoing evaluation, the Board has

made the following assessments:

- 1) As more professionals find themselves required to obtain proper licensure in order to obtain employment in the State of Mississippi, the LPC Board incurs additional expenses. However, the ability to license counselors in turn means more revenue from collection of fees to cover expenses.
- 2) Increased propensity of the public to file formal complaints and the Board's pro-active nature to pursue persons practicing as a counselor without proper license as well as holding hearings for denial of licensure of persons not meeting requirements impacts the budget necessary to pay expenses of Board members, hearing officers, and court reporters for participation in hearings as well as takes time away from the Board's ability to review license application files during monthly face to face meetings.
- 3) Increased expediency of Board action is directly related to the amount of time required by volunteer Board member.
- 4) Automated documentation by interactive website will positively impact personnel and Board productivity. Maintaining agency website in line with recommendations from the PEER Committee will impact expenses for the continued web design, data migration, and on-going management. Changes in technology has enhanced the productivity of the Board outside of face-to-face meetings and provided opportunity for virtual meetings. Videoconference Board meetings reduces the Board's meeting/travel expense.

The duties of the five appointed Board members, made up of representatives from each Congressional District plus one at-large member with an elected Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary/Treasurer, are to develop guidelines and implement procedures for granting state licenses to professional counselors, including required candidate testing and investigating all forms of formal complaints about the professional, ethical and legal practices of licensed professional counselors in the State of Mississippi.

The Board is only required to hold two regular meetings per year as pursuant to statute; however, the growing number of applicants with the implementation of a step license, statutory implementation of Universal Licensure and National Counseling Compact, increase in number of complaints, and other administrative needs makes it necessary to meet more often in person for 1-2 days and via video/teleconference, if the need for supplemental meetings arises. (The Board met 12 times in FY2023 with several of the meetings involving multiple days.) These meetings allow the Board to make decisions on requests, provide direction for the Executive Director, review applications, hear complaints, set forth policies and rules and regulations as needed, and provide educational programs for Licensed Professional Counselors and Board qualified supervisors (LPC-S) via presentations at state and regional conferences. At these meetings, Board members evaluate the progress made toward established goals and objectives and make changes when appropriate. With the advancements in technology and online licensee database, the purchase of user-friendly technology for each of the 5 board members, Executive Director, and the Attorney to assist with Board Meetings, Compliance Reviews, and Hearings of Licensed Professional Counselors regulated by the agency will increase Board and personnel productivity and efficiency. The Board equipment will need to be updated and replaced.

- 5) The Board developed and implemented a jurisprudence assessment in FY 2020 and extensively revised it in FY2023 to ensure licensees are staying abreast of the Rules and Regulations of the Board, *Miss Code Ann. § 73-30-1*, et., and the Board adopted *American Counseling Association Code of Ethics*. The FY2023 revisions to the jurisprudence were necessary due to the sweeping changes in the Board’s Rules and Regulations implemented in FY2023 which provided fewer restrictive regulations for Professional Counselor licensure pathway for first-time Applicants as well as to allow easier licensing process for licensees from other states moving to Mississippi. The Board also developed and implemented a new pass/fail jurisprudence examination in FY 2023 to ensure license applicants are aware of the current Rules and Regulations of the Board, *Miss Code Ann. § 73-30-1*, et., and the Board adopted *American Counseling Association Code of Ethics*. The Board will continue to monitor the competency, effectiveness, and excellence of the Licensed Professional Counselors through requirement of continuing education for renewal of licenses as well as the administration of jurisprudence examination. As Rules and Regulations and Statutes are revised or updated and legislation introduced, the Board is required to continue to update the jurisprudence assessment as well as the Mississippi Pass/Fail Jurisprudence Examination.
- 6) The Board purchased LiveScan Fingerprinting Processing software and hardware equipment (FingerPro ID software and Green Bit DactyScan 84c ten-print Livescan equipment and card scanner) to decrease the amount of turnaround time for receiving results from the FBI/DPS/CIC. Receipt of background check results dramatically increased during the shutdown of many statewide agencies due to COVID-19 and has yet to return to response times prior to implementation of the Governor’s Proclamation in March 2020. This caused extreme delays in license application processing due to incomplete application packets, thus impacting the number of professionals licensed in the State of Mississippi and access to quality mental health counseling and psychotherapy

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Measures by Program

6.1 Agency Goals by Program

Program 1: Licensure & Regulation

GOAL A: Issue licenses to individuals who satisfactorily meet set standards and qualifications (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-1 & 73-30-7 & 73-30-9 & 73-30-21*)

Objective A.1. Develop and impose standards which must be met by individuals in order to receive a license as a professional counselor or a step license as a supervisee

<i>Outcome:</i>	Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)
<i>Outcome:</i>	Change in number of complaints filed (%)
<i>Efficiency:</i>	Average cost per license maintained

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide a comprehensive application that requires fingerprint background check and satisfactorily meeting minimum requirements to become licensed as a professional counselor

Output: Number of complaints filed yearly
Output: Number of new Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors licenses issued
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

Objective A.2. Develop and implement educational program to train Licensed Professional Counselors who are Board qualified supervisors

Output: Number of LPC-Supervisors
Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

A.2.1. STRATEGY: Provide on-going training to Board qualified supervisors

Output: Number of LPC-Supervisors
Output: Change in number of complaints filed yearly (%)
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

GOAL B: Renew licenses for individuals who satisfactorily meet requirements (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-29*)

Objective B.1. Review and assess qualifications for renewal of licenses for both the Professional Counselors and Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors

Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed against Professional Counselors (%)
Outcome: Change in number of persons not meeting license renewal requirements (%)

B.1.1. STRATEGY: Provide a comprehensive renewal application that requires personal and licensure history, fingerprint background check every 6 years, and satisfactorily meets continuing education requirements for a Licensed Professional Counselor

Output: Number of license renewals received
Efficiency: Average cost per license maintained

GOAL C: Regulate and enforce the laws governing Licensed Professional Counselors and Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors (*Miss. Code Ann. Section 73-30-1 & 73-30-13*)

Objective C.1. Establish procedures to ensure compliance with standards, laws and rules

Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed (%)
Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)

Objective C.2. Regulate and enforce state laws and rules

Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed yearly (%)

Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)

Objective C.3. Conduct complaint investigations and hearings as needed

Outcome: Change in number of complaints filed yearly (%)

Outcome: Change in number of qualified Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Professional Counselors (%)

C.4.1. STRATEGY: Follow established statute, rules, and policy for investigating any complaint against a Provisional-Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Professional Counselor, or someone practicing without a license or applicant who has been denied licensure

Output: Change in number of complaints filed yearly (%)